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Chechnya, Detention Camps in

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*The imprisonment of men in the Russian republic
of Chechnya for alleged homosexuality.*

The existence in the Russian republic of Chechnya of detention camps for men deemed to be homosexual was revealed in April 2017 by Elena Milashina, a journalist with the Moscow newspaper *Novaya Gazeta*. Further investigations confirmed that more than 100 men had been incarcerated for alleged homosexuality in two unofficial jail facilities in the town of Argun and the village of Tsotsi-Yurt—both situated near Grozny, the capital of Chechnya (Lokshina 2017; Dearden 2017; Knight 2017). At least three men were reported murdered (Milashina and Gordienko 2017). These detentions were undertaken by the republic's official law enforcement officers, including the special forces commander Abuzaid Vismuradov (Milashina 2017b), with the complicity of Chechnya's parliamentary speaker, Magomed "Lord" Daudov, considered to be one of the closest friends of the head of the republic, Ramzan Kadyrov (Lokshina 2017). The authorities of the republic refuted these reports, citing the absence of LGBT persons in the region (Walker 2017a).

The Russian LGBT Network organized evacuations of the victims and LGBT individuals who felt threatened by the actions of Chechen authorities. The victims were transferred to Moscow and Saint Petersburg to initiate

procedures for acquiring refugee status outside Russia. The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs assisted in obtaining international passports, while some European Union states expressed readiness to accommodate the victims (Ponniah 2017). By mid-summer 2017, 120 persons had applied to the Russian LGBT Network for help, 75 had been evacuated, and 27 had left Russia (Russian LGBT Network 2017b). In September, the Canadian charity organization Rainbow Railroad reported that another 35 victims were granted refugee status in Canada (Gilchrist 2017). Yet, detentions in Chechnya continued as of 2017.

How the Camps Were Established

At the outset, the antigay campaign in Chechnya was associated with attempts to organize an LGBT pride parade in neighboring regions in March 2017 (Milashina 2017a). Victims' testimonies (Gessen 2017) permitted the reconstruction of a different picture relating to more general, extralegal practices of local police forces, as some gay men were detained as early as autumn 2016 and claimed they were not the first ones to find themselves in the unofficial jails (Lokshina 2017; Khazov-Cassia 2017a). In fact, the detention of one individual arrested by police on 21 February on charges of substance use was enough to initiate a purge of gay men in the republic (Milashina and Gordienko 2017). His smartphone contacts served as a list of suspects: once caught, a person became the source of information for police officers who intended to find his associates. As ex-detainees recall, they were kept together with substance users; drug use, like homosexuality, is also not illegal in Russia but is punished nonetheless. While in jail, the detainees were tortured with electric shocks and beatings in order to make them disclose the names of their connections. Their cellular phone contacts were inspected for more potential victims. The information would be used for blackmail or to further extralegal investigations. Thus, the number of victims snowballed (Gessen 2017; Khazov-Cassia 2017a).

Perceived sexual identities of the detainees have not always matched their own self-understanding. Although police officers targeted gay men, some of their victims were bisexual or heterosexual individuals. Nevertheless, this was not always regarded as a reason to stop the illegal persecution. The detainees were kept in the detention camps for different amounts of time, from a week to several months (Gessen 2017; Milashina and Gordienko 2017; Khazov-Cassia 2017a). Those who survived torture were handed back to their families. The sexual identity of the detainees was revealed to their families, and police officers then instructed these families to commit honor killings to wash away the "shame" of homosexuality from their kin (*Washington Post* 2017). Journalists discovered at least two such cases in which the instructions were followed (Milashina 2017a).

The existence of detention camps for gay men was reported to Russian federal government officials (Lui 2017). Continuing their investigation, journalists found a list of twenty-seven persons executed for a variety of accusations, from terrorism to being gay (Bobrova and Milashina 2017). This information was forwarded to federal law enforcement agencies with all relevant details. The Russian Federal Investigation Committee initiated inspections of Chechen police practices (Walker 2017b). The chief of inspection was soon removed, however, and eventually the federal committee did not uncover any “facts” relating to violence against LGBT people in Chechnya. As of October 2017, the Russian ombudswoman, herself a former police officer, continued to press the investigation committee (Bobrova and Milashina 2017).

Although only men were placed in the detention camps, the situation for lesbians in the republic of Chechnya is also alarming. The camps-related story

prompted journalistic investigations into the everyday experiences of women who secretly identify as lesbians. Forced marriage, rape, and honor killings are among the methods used by the women’s families to violently control their sexuality (Khazov-Cassia 2017b).

Cultural Attitudes toward Homosexuality in Chechnya

The situation relating to the detention camps in Chechnya signals a break with the established culture of silence surrounding homosexuality that had previously characterized the environment in the republic of Chechnya and that corresponded to the more general conditions of LGBT citizens in Russia (Kondakov 2014). Some of the victims were Chechen television reporters and singers whose homosexuality had been tolerated by the society until then. Earlier reports from 2013 revealed the existence of a Chechen gay underground (Leonova 2013). The accounts



Maxim Lapunov at a Press Conference in Moscow to Describe His Detention and Torture in Chechnya, 2017. Lapunov, an openly gay man, was a victim of a crackdown on gay men in Chechnya. The Russian LGBT Network organized evacuations of LGBT individuals from Chechnya to Moscow and Saint Petersburg and aided them in the application process to be classified as refugees outside of Russia. © ALEXANDER NEMENOV/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

of a transgender refugee confirm that the current situation is dramatically different from both that of the Soviet period and of a more recent history (Taylor 2017).

Chechnya is a predominately Muslim region (Abdulagatov 2014) and as such, in the framework of colonial logic, has served as a barbarian Other for Russia (Reznikova 2014; Russell 2005; Essig 1999), including with regard to its Muslim traditions related to homosexual practices (Healey 2001). During the Soviet period, the patriarchal norms of the society were destabilized by Soviet anti-religious campaigns and policies involving women in paid work (Szczepanikova 2012). As a consequence, religion and patriarchal rule were privatized: in many respects, expressions of patriarchy were conditioned by arrangements in specific households (Sokirianskaia 2005; Kurbanova 2011).

In the post-Soviet period, however, all further developments have been structured by the war between the Chechen government and Russian federal forces (Sakwa 2005). Chechnya enjoyed relative independence between 1991 and 2000, and federal military operations ceased only in 2009 (Sakwa 2010). The war contributed to the militarization of public life, poverty, a degradation of education, and the spread of lawlessness. This led to the strengthening of the patriarchal order within the “war generation” as a result of the lack of education and general disenfranchisement (Szczepanikova 2012). Besides, the Kremlin-backed leader of Chechnya, Akhmad Kadyrov (who previously served as the major mufti of the independent Chechen state) promoted a particular kind of Islamization (Wilhelmsen 2005): a puritan Sufist version of the religion as opposed to a violent Wahhabism (Russell 2008). After his assassination in 2004, his son reinforced the political deployment of Islam in the republic through official policies and the support of vigilante groups policing public expressions of gender (BBC News 2016).

Revival of dogmatic Islam, conditions of war, and authoritarian postwar administration have produced an environment in which ignorant attitudes toward sexual diversity, so common in Russia, are amplified in Chechnya. Police brutality and atrocities are part of the experience of LGBT citizens in many regions of Russia. Chechnya, however, is distinguished by the scale of these practices, best exemplified in the existence of detention camps for gay men.

SEE ALSO *El Baile de los 41; Bathhouse Raids, Toronto (1981); Human Rights in Europe; ISIS Gay Trials; Queen Boat Trials (2001–2002); Russian Gay Propaganda Law*

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Chevalier d'Éon or Mademoiselle Beaumont (1728–1810)

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The colorful life of the famous eighteenth-century French cross-dresser.

Charles-Geneviève-Louis-Auguste-André-Thimothée d'Éon de Beaumont, also known as Mademoiselle de Beaumont, is a historical figure surrounded by wide speculation. He was a member of the group of spies *Le Secret du Roi* (King's Secret) in the service of the French king Louis XV (1710–1774). It has been claimed that as a French diplomat he entered the court of the Russian empress Elizabeth by posing as a woman, Lía Beaumont, and facilitated the rapprochement between France and Russia, for which he received the Cross of Saint Louis.

In 1763 he was sent to the British court now dressed as a man with the aim of facilitating a French invasion of Britain, but his lifestyle and difficult behavior soon had the French government attempting to recall him. Using his leverage as a royal spy and ambassador with access to incriminating documents, d'Éon threatened to reveal all. He published a book of diplomatic correspondence in 1764, making him a sympathetic figure in Britain because of the embarrassment the book's publication caused the French government. Louis XV decided to continue to use d'Éon, who now had even better coverage as a spy given his contentious relationship with the French government.